

Integration or isolation? Considering implications of the designation 'woman composer'

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Abstract: The designation 'woman composer' is opposed by some feminists as it is claimed that it segregates women's music and places it further outside the mainstream. This paper considers the ideological implications of the term 'woman composer' and explores the consequences of discussing female composers independently. Musicological attitudes to current methodological approaches are also explored. Indeed, studies of women composers' contributions to musical life in the nineteenth century have now become prevalent in musical scholarship. However, women are still underrepresented in stock pedagogical anthologies and histories, despite an increasing availability of primary and secondary literature. This paper argues that the continued absence of women in music history has been partly brought about by a shortage of critical examination of women's music.

Charles Rosen recognised that women have been 'harshly excluded from history and attempting to bring them uncritically and naively back into it neither does them posthumous justice nor acknowledge the difficult reality of their lives.' Rosen alluded to the need for a unique approach to these activities in order to reveal their distinctive achievements despite the struggles they faced. Marian Wilson Kimber, however, alludes to the problematic nature of research in the area and the risk of creating 'a discourse based on what women might have achieved,' while the importance of attempting to understand women's achievements in music 'in their own terms' has been highlighted by Marcia Citron. This paper argues that a balanced approach to the music of women is therefore crucial; that is, one that is sensitive to women's sociological positions in the nineteenth century while giving their music the careful analytical attention it deserves.